

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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SAB-01 OMB-01 IO-13 ACDA-07 /080 W

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R 291539Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1262

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 3011

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT IS

SUBJ: THE QADOUM CHALLENGE--CRISIS OR COMPROMISE

REF: TEL AVIV 1802

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE CABINET DEBATE ON QADOUM, WHICH IS DUE TO TAKE PLACE ON MAY 9, LOOMS AHEAD AS A CRITICAL TEST FOR THE RABIN GOVERNMENT. QADOUM HAS BECOME THE SYMBOL OF CONFRONTATION BETWEEN ISRAELI HARDLINERS AND MODERATES OVER THE BASIS ISSUES DIVIDING THE NATION, THE FOCUS OF MOUNTING TENSIONS BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND WEST BANK PALESTINIANS, AND THE TOUCHSTONE OF U.S./ ISRAELI DIFFERENCES ON SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. RABIN, CAUGHT BETWEEN COUNTERPRESSURES FROM QADOUM SUPPORTERS AND ADVOCATES OF EVACUATION, IS PRESERVING HIS OPTIONS. IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE CABINET WILL REAFFIRM ITS TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENT POLICY AND IN THE PROCESS AUTHORIZE NEW SETTLEMENTS. IT IS UNCERTAIN HOWEVER, WHETHER A COMPROMISE FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED CAN BE WORKED OUT. FORMIN ALLON BELIEVES THAT THE CABINET WILL PROPOSE AN ALTERNATE LOCATION TO THE QADOUM SETTLERS AND THAT THEY CAN
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BE PERSUADED TO RELOCATE WITHOUT A CABINET CRISIS. SOME

OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE CABINET WILL ALLOW THE SETTLERS TO REMAIN IN PLACE WITHOUT GIVING THE SETTLEMENT OFFICIAL STATUS. IF THE EFFORT TO STRIKE A COMPROMISE FAILS, RABIN WILL BE CONFRONTED WITH A CABINET CRISIS--IN TURN LEADING TO EITHER A MINORITY GOVERNMENT WITHOUT THE NRP OR THE NECESSITY TO GO TO EARLY ELECTIONS. BEYOND THE UNCERTAINTY REGARDING THE CABINET DECISION, THE POSSIBILITY OF VIOLENCE AT QADOUM AND ELSEWHERE HANGS IN THE AIR. END SUMMARY.

1. THE STAKES. THE CABINET DEBATE ON QADOUM WILL BE A MAJOR TEST FOR THE RABIN GOVERNMENT, TRANSCENDING THE NARROW QUESTION OF WHETHER 100 SETTLERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO ESTABLISH A PERMANENT NEW SETTLEMENT IN SAMARIA TO ENCOMPASS THE LARGER ISSUES OF SETTLEMENT POLICY, THE FUTURE OF JEWISH-ARAB RELATIONS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND ISRAEL, AND THE RULE OF LAW IN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. GIVEN THE DEEP DIVISIONS WITHIN THE COALITION PARTIES, THERE MAY BE A GOVERNMENT CRISIS IF A COMPROMISE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL CANNOT BE FOUND. AT STAKE IS THE ABILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO DETERMINE ITS SETTLEMENT GOALS AND PRIORITIES AGAINST THE CHALLENGE OF THE GUSH EMUNIM SETTLERS AND THEIR NATIONALIST SUPPORTERS WHO ARE TRYING TO CONFRONT IT WITH A FAIT ACCOMPLI IN ORDER TO CUTT OFF FUTURE NEGOTIATING OPTIONS REGARDING THE DISPOSITION OF THE WEST BANK

2. THE ISSUES. QADOUM HAS EMERGED AS A SYMBOL OF THE DEEP DIVISION IN ISRAEL BETWEEN TWO DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND ZIONIST PHILOSOPHIES. ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL, QADOUM IS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT ISRAELIS BY RIGHT ARE ENTITLED TO SETTLE EVERYWHERE IN THE "LAND OF ISRAEL" AND THAT THE ENTIRE WEST BANK--INCLUDING SAMARIA--MUST REMAIN PERMANENTLY UNDER ISRAELI CONTROL AGAINST THOSE WHO WISH TO LIMIT SETTLEMENTS TO STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT LOCATIONS AND TO LEAVE OPEN THE OPTION OF A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE WITH JORDAN AND/OR SOME PALESTINIAN ENTITY. AS AN ISSUE OF PRINCIPLE, QADOUM IS A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN EXPONENTS OF MESSIANIC ZIONSIM WHOSE HISTORICAL/RELIGIOUS CLAIMS TO THE "LAND OF ISRAEL" ARE NON-NEGOTIABLE VERSUS ADVOCATES OF POLITICAL ZIONISM WHO, TO A GREATER OR LESSER DEGREE, ARE PREPARED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT AND SEEK SOME ACCOMMODATION WITH THE COMPETING CLAIMS OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

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TO THE SAME LAND. FINALLY, QADOUM IS A CHALLENGE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S AUTHORITY, A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THOSE WHO BELIEVE THE RULE OF LAW AND DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURES MUST BE PRESERVED AGAINST THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE "POPULAR WILL" AND THEIR SUBJECTIVE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE GIVE THEM A HIGHER SANCTION TO DETERMINE PUBLIC POLICY.

3. U.S. POLICY AND WEST BANK FERMENT. THE GUSH EMUNIM HAS

CHOSEN ITS TARGET DELIBERATELY, WITH THE PURPOSE OF FORCING OUT INTO THE OPEN THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON THE FUTURE OF SAMARIA WHERE SO FAR NO SETTLEMENTS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED. BEYOND DETERMINING THE FATE OF QADOUM ITSELF, THE CABINET DECISION WILL BE READ HERE AS THE ISRAELI RESPONSE TO A) U.S. OPPOSITION TO SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AS REFLECTED IN THE SCRANTON UNSC SPEECH, AND B) THE MOUNTING NATIONALIST FERMENT OF WEST BANKERS AS MANIFESTED IN THE RESULTS OF TH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND THE CONTINUING WAVE OF ANTI-ISRAELI DEMONSTRATION AND PROTESTS IN RECENT MONTHS. RABIN GAVE A STRONG INDICATION LAST WEEK THAT THE RESPONSE WILL INCLUDE THE RE-AFFIRMATION OF THE WELL-ESTABLISHED OBJECTIVE--OUTLINED AS FAR BACK AS THE 1969 "ORAL DOCTRINE" OF THE LABOR PARTY--TO ESTABLISH SETTLEMENTS ON THE GLAN HEIGHTS, THE JORDAN VALLEY, THE RAFAH JUNCTION AREA AND AT SHARM EL-SHEIKH AS PART OF ISRAEL'S DEFENSE LINE (TEL AVIV 2823). THUS, EVEN A "COMPROMISE" OFFERING THE QADOUM SETTLERS ANOTHER LOCATION WILL LEAVE A WIDE GAP BETWEEN U.S. AND ISRAELI VIEWS ON SETTLEMENTS, AND WILL DO LITTLE IF ANYTHING TO DIMINISH THE MOUNTING TENSIONS BETWEEN JEWS AND ARABS.

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4. QADOUM TODAY. ACCORDING TO A REPORT ON ISRAELI TELEVISION,

THERE ARE PRESENTLY 24 FAMILIES COMPRISING ABOUT 100 PEOPLE AT QADOUM. ONLY SEVEN MEN ARE WORKING AT THE CAMP, WITH THE REMAINDER CONTINUING TO TRAVE TO THEIR JOBS IN VARIOUS PARTS OF ISRAEL. THE QADOUM SETTLERS ARE HOLDING ON TO THEIR RESIDENCES ELSEWHERE WHILE AWAITING THE DECISION ON THEIR FUTURE. THE ARMY CONTINUES TO SUPPLY BASIC SERVICES BUT OTHER MAINTENANCE COSTS APPARENTLY ARE COVERED BY THE GUSH EMUNIM THROUGH PRIVATE CONTRIBUTIONS.

5. THE LINE UP OF FORCES. QADOUM PITS THE ANTI-WITHDRAWAL FORCES OF THE LIKUD, THE NRP AND RAFI AGAINST MOST OF THE LABOR PARTY, MAPAM, THE INDEPENDENT LIBERALS, AND MOKED. IN THE CABINET, POSITIONS ARE NOT FULLY CLEAR. RABIN IS CHARACTERISTICALLY NOT REVEALING HIS HAND AND PERES IS ALSO PRESERVING HIS OPTIONS. ALLON, ZADOK AND THE MAPAM MINISTERS SUPPORT THE EVACUATION OF QADOUM HILE NRP MINISTER HAMMER THREATENS TO RESIGN IF THIS OCCURS AND MAY BE ABLE TO PULL HIS COLLEAGUES BURG AND RAPHEAEL OUT WITH HIM.

6. SCENARIOS. THE FOLLOWING SCENARIOS AS TO WHAT MAY HAPPEN
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ARE BEING MENTIONED: A) THE GOVERNMENT REAFFIRMS ITS TRADITIONAL SETTELEMENTS POLICY, AUTHORIZES NEW SETTELEMENTS AND OFFERS THE QADOUM SETTLERS ANOTHER LOCATION NEAR TO BUT NOT IN SAMARIA. ALLON, WHO BACKS THIS APPROACH, BELIEVES THAT EVEN SUPPORTERS OF THE QADOUM SETTLERS--I.E., PERES-- WILL COME AROUND TO THIS POSITION, AND THAT IF IT ALSO GETS STRONG BACKING IN PUBLIC OPINION THE SETTLERS CAN BE PERSUADED TO MOVE; IF NOT, THE CABINET WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE TO REMOVE THEM BY FORCE. B) THE SETTLERS ARE ALLOWED TO STAY, BUT QADOUM IS NOT RECOGNIZED AS AN OFFICIAL SETTLEMENT. THE GOVERNMENT WILL DECLARE AGAIN THAT IT WILL NOT PERMIT UNAUTHORIZED SETTLEMENTS AND THAT THERE WILL BE NO MORE QADOUMS. C) THE GOVERNMENT, BY A MAJORITY VOTE, DECIDES TO EVACUATE QADOUM. THE NRP MINISTERS RESIGN AND A PARLIAMENTARY CRISIS ENSUES. THIS IN TURN COULD LEAD TO EITHER A MINORITY GOVERNMENT OR TO EARLY ELECTIONS.

7. UNCERTAIN PROSPECTS. AT THIS POINT NO ONE CAN PREDICT WHAT WILL HAPPEN. WE BELIEVE RABIN, WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON SETTLEMENTS, ISRAEL GALILI, WILL TRY TO FIND A COMPROMISE SOLUTION WHICH WILL PRESERVE HIS COALITION INTACT AND PREVENT A GOVERNMENT CRISIS. WHETHER HE CAN DO SO WILL DEPEND NOT ONLY ON HIS SKILL IN FINDING AN ACCEPTABLE FORMULA BUT ON WHAT HIS COALITION PARTNERS WILL DO IN THE CRUNCH. EQUALLY IMPORTANT WILL BE THE RESPONSE OF THE QADOUM SETTLERS TO THE CABINET'S DECISION, PARTICULARLY WHETHER THEY ACCEDE TO IT PEACEMULLY OR GO OVER THE BRINK TO VIOLENCE IF IT GOES AGAINST THEM. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE,

IT SEEMS THAT THE NRP IS BETTER ABLE THAN MAPAM TO EXERT
MEANINGFUL PRESSURES SINCE THE LATTER DOES NOT WANT THE
GOVERNMENT TO FALL.

8. CONCLUSION: A CRITICAL MOMENT, ONE WHICH RABIN HAS
REPEATEDLY DEFERRED, LIES AHEAD. IF A COMPROMISE IS NOT FOUND,
THERE COULD BE A GOVERNMENT CRISIS AGAINST THE BACKDOP OF A
FORCED EVACUATION, DEMONSTRATIONS AND VIOLENCE. QADOUM HAS
ALREADY BECOME A SYMBOL OF CONFRONTATION OVER THE BASIC ISSUES
DIVIDING THE NATION. THE GOVERNMENT AGAIN MAY FIND A WAY TO
SIDESTEP THESE ISSUES OR THIS TIME IT MAY FIND ITSELF
FINALLY CARRIED ALONG TO A DECISION WHICH WILL SET IN MOTION
A WHOLE NEW CHAIN OF COMPLICATED AND STORMY DEVELOPMENTS.
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